



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management



Elko Field Office  
3900 E. Idaho Street  
Elko, NV 89801

October 2003

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# **Approved Elko Resource Management Plan**

## **Wild Horse Amendment and Decision Record**



Photo by Shawna Richardson, BLM Wild Horse Specialist



# United States Department of the Interior

## Bureau of Land Management

Nevada State Office  
P.O. Box 12000 (1340 Financial Blvd.)  
Reno, Nevada 89520-0006  
<http://www.nv.blm.gov/>

In Reply Refer To:  
1610/4710 (NV-930)

[Stamped October 14, 2003]

Dear Reader:

Enclosed is a copy of the Approved Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP) Wild Horse Amendment and Decision Record (DR). This RMP amendment outlines the level of management for wild horse management areas within the Elko RMP planning area. The document summarizes and completes the planning process for this RMP Amendment.

This document contains two parts. Part 1, RESOURCE DECISIONS FOR WILD HORSES addresses the Objective, Short and Long Term Management Actions, Standard Operating Procedures, Implementation, and Monitoring and Evaluation of the Amendment. Part 2, DECISION RECORD includes the Rationale for the decision, Compliance and Monitoring, Summary of Public Involvement and Approval.

Implementation of the decisions by the Elko Field Manager may begin 30 days following the date this document is available to the public.

All parties on the distribution list for this document are being mailed copies. This document may also be obtained from the Elko Field Office at 3900 East Idaho Street, Elko, NV 89801, telephone 775-753-0200. It may also be viewed or downloaded from the Elko Field Office website at [www.nv.blm.gov/elko](http://www.nv.blm.gov/elko).

For additional information, please call Bryan Fuell, Wild Horse Specialist at the Elko Field Office. Thank you for your interest in wild horse management on public lands in northeastern Nevada.

Sincerely,

/s/

Robert V. Abbey  
State Director, Nevada

Enclosure  
As Stated Above

**APPROVED**

**ELKO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**WILD HORSE AMENDMENT**

**and**

**DECISION RECORD**

**BLM/EK/PL-2003/024**

**Prepared by  
Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Elko Field Office**

**October 2003**

The Elko Resource Management Plan, as it was approved in 1987, recognizes four areas used as habitat by wild horses when the Free-Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Act was passed in 1971. The four herds are the Little Humboldt, Rock Creek, Owyhee and Diamond Hills North herds. These wild horse herd areas are all located in Elko County, Nevada. This amendment designates wild horse “herd management areas” (HMAs) within the herd areas for the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek herds. It clarifies that the HMAs for the Owyhee and Diamond Hills North herds are comprised of the originally established herd areas in their entirety. This Amendment also updates direction for the management of wild horses to reflect current policies for wild horse management, and incorporates decisions that have been made to implement the RMP since it was issued in 1987.

For further information contact Bryan Fuell, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Bureau of Land Management, 3900 East Idaho Street, Elko, Nevada 89801, telephone (775) 753-0200.

See Map Insert

ELKO RMP

WILD HORSE HERD MANAGEMENT AREAS

## **Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment and Decision Record (DR) updates direction for the management for wild horses, as approved by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Nevada State Director, on March 11, 1987. The Elko RMP planning area covers the western portion of the Elko district in northeastern Nevada. This planning area is comprised of approximately 6 million acres, of which over 3 million acres is public land that is administered by the Elko Field Office.

The BLM strives to manage wild horses only within areas designated as “Herd Management Area” (HMAs) by a RMP. This RMP Amendment has been completed to include formal designation of HMAs for each herd in the planning area of the Elko RMP. The 1987 RMP provides direction for the management of four wild horse herd areas (HAs). *HAs are limited to areas of public lands identified as being habitat used by wild horses at time of the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971*, as amended (1971 Act; 16 U.S.C. 1331-1340; P.L. 92-195). The four HAs are the Little Humboldt, Rock Creek, Owyhee and Diamond Hills (North). The HAs are all located in Elko County (see map). They total approximately 657,000 acres, of which about 92 percent are public lands. HMAs are designated only on areas within HAs where wild horses can be managed for the long term.

This Approved Amendment is in two sections to meet requirements of the Federal Land Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1711). Part 1 is the approved Resource Management Plan Amendment, and Part 2 is a Decision Record.

The BLM completed an environmental assessment (EA) on the Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4332 *et seq.*). The EA resulted in a “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI), dated July 30, 2003, for implementation of the proposed action as described and analyzed by the EA. The July 2003 document, to include the EA and FONSI, is incorporated by reference, and is available from the Elko Field Office.

### **PART 1: ELKO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT RESOURCE DECISIONS**

Long-term management of wild horses on public lands within the planning area of the Elko RMP is to occur within designated herd management areas (HMAs) as shown the accompanying map, in accordance with the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and regulations at 43 CFR 4700. Two of the HAs (Owyhee and Diamond Hills North) are designated in whole HMAs as established under the 1971 Act. The other two HAs (Rock Creek and Little Humboldt) are designated HMAs, as follows:

1. The HMA for the Little Humboldt herd is designated as the Castle Ridge Pasture of the HA (see also Map 2-1 of BLM/EK/PL-2003/024).

**Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

2. The Rock Creek HMA consists of the Burner Hills, Winters Creek, and Red Cow pastures of the northern portion of the HA of the Spanish Ranch Allotment, and extends south into Soldier Field of the Squaw Valley Allotment (see also Map 2-2 of BLM/EK/PL-2003/024).
3. The Owyhee HA and Diamond Hills North HA are designated as HMAs in their entirety.

This Amendment also updates the desired herd size that could be managed within each HMA while still preserving and maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship for the area, and provides guidelines for adjusting herd size. It allows for the removal of wild horse from portions of the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HAs that are not designated as the HMA.

Implementation and monitoring actions for this RMP Amendment include the establishment of and maintenance of appropriate management levels (AMLs) for wild horses in each HMA.

**Objective:**

Manage for a wild horse herd size within a designated wild horse HMA to maintain a thriving ecological balance consistent with other multiple uses.

**Short and Long Term Management Actions:**

1. Manage wild horses in the four designated HMAs, as shown on the map and to include the approximate acreage of public and private lands as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Wild Horse Herd Areas and Herd Management Areas**  
**(Acres)**

HERD	HA Public Land	HA Private Land	HA Total Acres	HMA Public Land	HMA Private Land	HMA Total Acres
Little Humboldt	53,377	10,560	63,937	15,734	1,417	17,151
Rock Creek	145,140	38,356	183,496	102,638	24,115	126,753
Subtotal	198,517	48,916		118,372	25,532	
Owyhee	336,262	2,842	339,104			339,104
Diamond Hills	69,056	1,423	70,479			70,479
Subtotal	405,318	4,265		405,318	4,265	
TOTAL	603,835	53,181	657,016 <sup>1</sup>	523,690	29,797	553,487

<sup>1</sup> Total HA acres are corrected from amount reported in the EA (BLM/EK/PL-2003/024).

2. Manage for a desired herd size as shown in Table 2. The desired herd size for a given herd is the estimated number of horses that could be sustained while preserving and maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship. It is intended as a starting point for determining appropriate wild horse numbers.

**Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

**Table 2**  
**Wild Horse Herd Size**  
**(Number of Adult Wild Horses)**

<b>WILD HORSE HMA</b>	<b>DESIRED HERD SIZE (*see Notes)</b>	<b>2003 POPULATION ESTIMATE</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>Little Humboldt</b>	80	185**	*AML, based on monitoring data from the May 2002 Draft Little Humboldt Allotment Evaluation and stipulated agreement dated 6/24/02. ** 2003 Population Estimate is based on census data collected in September 03.
<b>Rock Creek</b>	250	1,010**	*Desired Herd Size is based on monitoring data from the 1997 Rock Creek Allotment Evaluation. AML needs to be established. ** 2003 Population Estimate is based on census data collected in September 2003.
<b>Owyhee</b>	231	239	*AML established by the Owyhee Allotment Final MUD dated 4/19/02.
<b>Diamond Hills North</b>	37	71	*AML established in 1997 through agreements with grazing permittees for the Red Rock (31 horses) and Browne (6 horses) Allotments.
<b>Total number of wild horses</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>1,505</b>	

3. Establish or re-evaluate the AMLs for wild horses, to include the population range within which the herd size will be allowed to fluctuate, based on monitoring and as part of completing allotment-specific evaluations and/or herd-specific Population Management Plans (PMPs).
4. Conduct gathers as necessary to reach the desired herd size and maintain the AML. Collect data for use in development of a PMP, in accordance with national program office guidance.
5. Maintain the four wild horse HAs as established under the 1971 Act. Manage portions of the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HAs outside of the designated HMAs as horse free.
6. Construct and maintain any fences along or within the boundaries of any HMA to be highly visible to wild horses. Fences constructed within a HMA cannot impede movement of wild horses. Such fences may be constructed to manage livestock grazing if needed to protect or improve habitat conditions for fish and wildlife species of special concern, such as Lahontan cutthroat trout, Interior redband trout, or sage grouse.
  - A short-term action for the Rock Creek herd is to move the northwest portion of the Buffalo Fire Rehabilitation fence to delineate the HMA boundary. The fence would continue to be highly visible to wild horses, and generally coincide with the boundary between the Spanish Ranch and Squaw Valley allotments.
7. Monitor wild horse populations and habitat conditions. Establish long term monitoring sites in each HMA.

## **Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

8. Manage combined use of livestock and wild horses to not exceed utilization criteria, as established or adjusted by allotment-specific evaluations/Multiple Use Decisions.

### **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):**

The following policies and SOPs are applicable to any plans for the management of wild horses and any actions proposed that have the potential to affect wild horses within the designated HMAs.

1. Management of wild horses will be guided by plans developed through consultation and coordination with interested parties and will be coordinated with livestock and wildlife plans and other resource plans (1987 Elko RMP ROD, page 33). Plans for wild horses will be based on population and habitat monitoring studies.
2. Write PMPs to specifically address the biology, ecology, and management of each herd. Within a PMP, the following are described: HMA description, herd history, herd genetic viability, herd social structure, herd demographics, population monitoring and evaluation, and consequences of management actions. Continue the use of a population computer model (WinEquus) to predict potential effects on population growth rates through implementation of different management strategies. Continue to use approved methods to reduce the frequency of wild horse gathers. Porcine zona pellucidae (PZP) immunocontraception injections are currently given to mares during gathers to prevent pregnancy.
3. Gather wild horses as necessary to achieve and maintain an ecological balance and multiple-use relationship in a given area to meet rangeland health standards. Gathers will be scheduled when data indicates the population of an HMA is not consistent with its AML. Gathers are normally scheduled following a bureau-wide gather strategy, where all HMAs are gathered on a four-year cycle. Gathers may also be conducted when emergency situations arise from such events as wildland fire or drought.
4. Follow the *Gather Policy and Selective Removal Criteria for Wild Horses* (Washington Office IM 2002-095). This strategy is designed to achieve AML on all HMAs by fiscal year 2005, implemented with the following priorities:
  - a) *Age Class Five Years and Younger*: Wild horses five years of age and younger may be removed and placed into the national adoption program.
  - b) *Age Class Ten Years and Older*: Wild horses ten years of age and older may be removed and placed into long-term holding.
  - c) *Age Class Six to Nine Years*: Wild horses aged six to nine years old should be removed last and only if the HMA cannot achieve AML without their removal.
5. Range improvement projects in wild horse management areas shall be designed to incorporate features for the management of free-roaming wild horses.
  - a) Lay-down fences will be constructed in wild horse areas if necessary and feasible. All fences will be made visible to the animals.
  - b) Water will be made available in allotments and rested pasture for wild horses wherever feasible.

## **Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

### **Implementation**

1. Establish the AML for wild horses within the Rock Creek HMA, through issuance of a final multiple-use decision.
2. A gather to the AML for the Owyhee herd was completed in December 2002. The current schedule for gathering of wild horses to AML and development of PMPs is: Owyhee, Diamond Hills North, Little Humboldt and Rock Creek.
3. Prepare PMPs to ensure the wild horse herd populations maintain their free-roaming, self-sustaining, and genetically viable status. All plans would be prepared based on data collected from gathers and monitoring, and in accordance with regulations, policies, and national program office guidance.
4. Re-evaluate AMLs as determined by the collection of monitoring data.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring includes not only tracking progress toward meeting resource management objectives, but monitoring of the RMP itself, as amended. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of actions to meet rangeland health standards and guidelines for wild horses, as approved by the Nevada State Director on December 14, 2000. This is in conjunction with monitoring to meet four rangeland health standards and associated guidelines of the Northeastern Great Basin Area Resource Advisory Council for upland sites, riparian and wetland sites, habitat, and cultural resources. Monitoring also occurs to meet area-specific objectives for wild horses, wildlife and livestock determined by activity plans, such as allotment evaluations/multiple use decisions, PMPs, allotment management plans, and habitat management plans.

## **PART 2: DECISION RECORD**

### **Resource Decisions**

The resource decisions, as outlined by Part 1 above, include actions as described and analyzed in the *Proposed Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment and Environmental Assessment* (Proposed Amendment/EA; BLM/EK/PL-2003/024). This includes the description of the “Proposed Action” and “Valid Existing Management” on pages 11-13 of the EA. The Proposed Action is BLM’s environmentally preferred alternative, and is selected as the Approved Elko Resource Management Wild Horse Amendment. Its implementation is subject to SOPs common to all alternatives, as also listed in Part 1 above and on pages 13-16 of the EA. Its implementation is also subject to any other applicable SOPs for resource protection from the Record of Decision for the 1987 Elko RMP, and any decisions issued for its implementation.

## **Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

### **Rationale For Decision**

My approval of this amendment to the Elko RMP for the management of wild horse to include the management determinations outlined in Part 1, is made for the following reasons:

1. Actions prescribed will facilitate meeting the objective of managing for a wild horse herd size within a designated wild horse HMA to maintain a thriving ecological balance consistent with other multiple uses. This includes the management of wild horses and habitat within the designated HMAs to improve rangeland conditions for wild horses and to conserve sensitive fish and wildlife species.
2. Implementation of this decision will not result in any unnecessary environmental deterioration. Upon issuing the EA on the Proposed Amendment (BLM/EK/PL-2003/024), I found that no significant impact to human environment would result from implementation of the proposed action as described and analyzed in the EA (FONSI dated July 30, 2003).
3. Efforts to recover Lahanton cutthroat trout will benefit from management of the portions of the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HAs not designated as HMAs as horse free areas.
4. The alternative of continuing current management without amending the 1987 RMP was not selected because it has not provided, and is not expected to provide, the Elko Field Office with the means to manage for a wild horse herd size in a manner consistent with maintaining a thriving ecological balance within the HAs, as established under the 1971 Act.
5. Reasons for eliminating other alternatives from detailed consideration suggested during public scoping are discussed on pages 16 and 17 of the EA. Alternatives that would not meet the need for or purpose of this Amendment included suggestions to eliminate wild horses from the Elko RMP planning area, eliminate livestock grazing from designated HMAs, and enlarge the wild horse HMAs (to include lands outside of the HAs). Alternatives for designation of the Rock Creek HMA to exclude certain pastures of the Spanish Ranch allotment (Red Cow and Winters pastures) were eliminated because they provide crucial habitat for wild horses. New alternatives suggested in letters of comment on the Proposed Amendment and EA were considered but not selected, for reasons discussed in the following section on public involvement.
6. The determinations in this amendment do not conflict with the other resource management actions (determinations) of the Elko RMP.
7. These determinations have also been coordinated with other Federal, state, local and tribal plans concerning the management of public lands. No conflicts were identified by the Governor's Office consistency review. This plan amendment has been determined to be consistent with other Federal, state, local and tribal plans to the maximum extent possible.

## **Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

### **Compliance and Monitoring**

Where conflicting direction involving the management of the public lands may occur between this plan amendment and those of state and local governments, this amendment will comply with the laws and statutes enacted by Congress to protect the interests of the citizens of the United States. These management determinations will be monitored and evaluated to coincide with the implementation of the existing Elko RMP.

### **Public Involvement**

The land use planning process for this Elko RMP Amendment began on February 10, 2003, with the publication of a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register*. This notice also initiated a 30-day public scoping period. An invitation to participate in scoping, including public meetings in Elko, Eureka and Reno, Nevada, was mailed to everyone on the Elko FO mailing list. A news release was issued to announce the dates and locations of the public meetings and the availability of additional information, and to request receipt of written comments by March 12, 2003. The three public scoping meetings were held on February 24, 25 and 26, 2003, in Elko, Eureka and Reno, Nevada. They were attended by grazing permittees, Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group representatives, wild horse advocates, and interested individuals. Nine letters of comment were received. A scoping results report is available from the Elko Field Office.

The Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment and EA was mailed to all individuals, agencies, and groups who expressed an interest in this planning process on July 27, 2003. The document was available for a 60-day Governor's consistency review and 30-day public protest period. No recommendations were received from the Governor's review. Comment letters on the Proposed Amendment/EA were received from the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses (Commission), Wild Horse Organized Assistance and Ellison Ranching Company.

A report documenting BLM's consideration of the comments received on the proposed amendment and EA is also available upon request to the Elko Field Office. Most comments were addressed by the alternatives considered and/or analysis of impacts, as discussed in the EA. Some are being, or will be, addressed through the process of implementing the amendment.

In commenting on the proposed plan, the Commission suggested a new alternative. It was to manage the Rock Creek, Little Humboldt, and Owyhee HMAs as a complex, to include the Snowstorm Mountains and Little Humboldt HMAs that are administered by the Winnemucca FO. Management as a complex had been eliminated early in the process of formulating alternatives, as being both impractical and unnecessary. The NDOW suggested an alternative to exclude Soldier Field from the Rock Creek HMA. BLM eliminated it from consideration early in the process, because its exclusion would not provide adequate summer habitat and water sources for year-round horse use. Ellison Ranching Company suggested elimination of the Red Cow and Winters Creek pastures from the Rock Creek HMA, to help meet objectives for sensitive redband trout habitat. It was eliminated because it would not provide adequate summer habitat and water for year-round horse use.

**Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment**

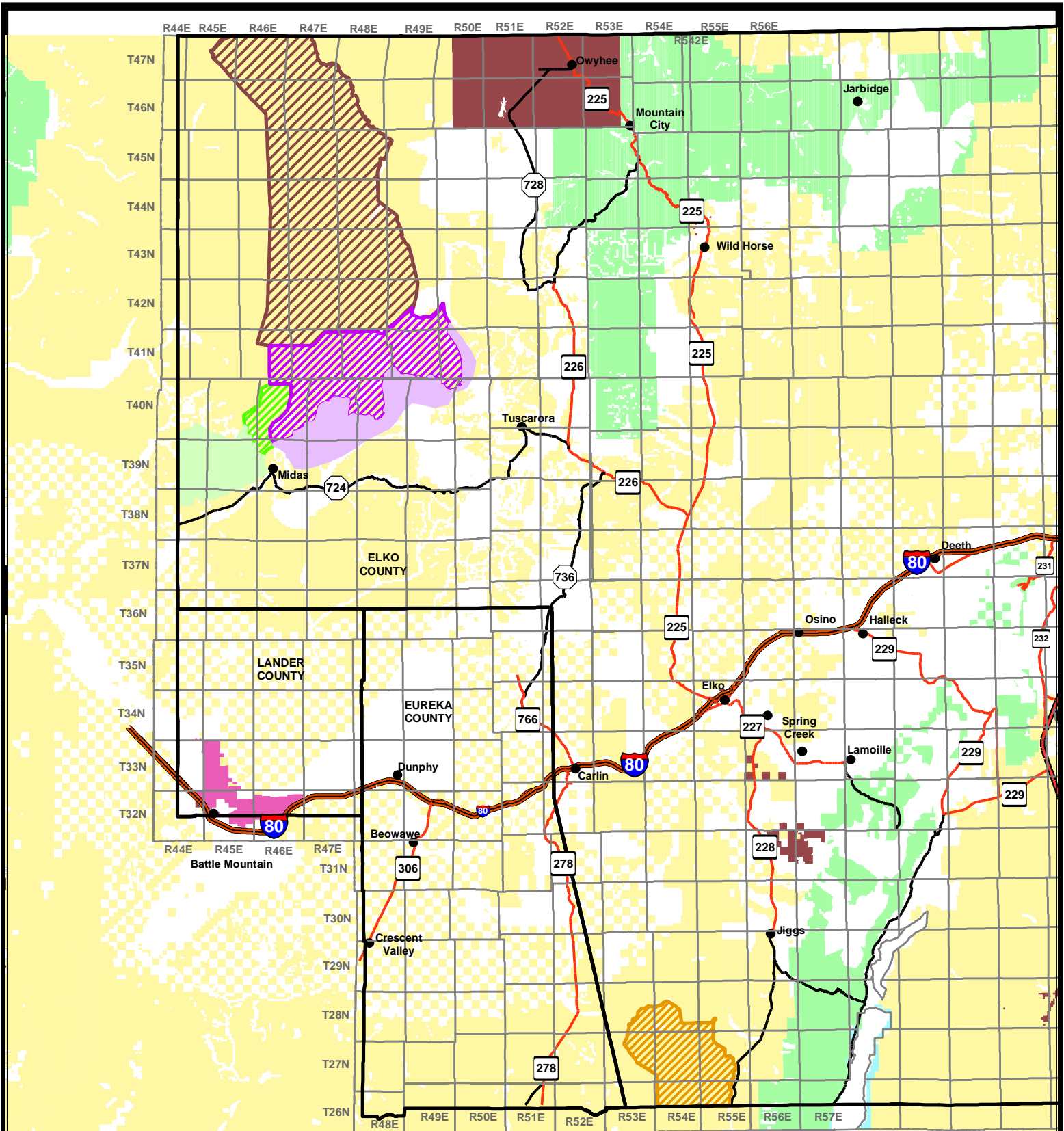
The Elko Field Manager will provide notice of the availability of the decision to the public. Those who submitted comments during the scoping period, and/or commented on the proposed plan and EA, will receive copies of this document.

**Approval**

The resource decisions for the wild horses, as outlined in Part 1, are approved. This decision is not subject to administrative appeal. In accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 1610.5-5, this approved Wild Horse Amendment for the Elko RMP may be implemented 30 days after issuance of a public notice of this action.

\_\_\_\_\_/s/\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert V. Abbey  
State Director, Nevada

\_\_\_\_10/14/03\_\_\_\_  
Date



#### Herd Management Areas

- Diamond Hills North
- Little Humboldt
- Owyhee
- Rock Creek

#### Herd Areas

- Little Humboldt
- Rock Creek

#### Landownership

- Public (Admin by BLM)
- Private Lands
- US Forest Service
- Native American Reservation
- Bureau of Reclamation



## ELKO RMP WILD HORSE HERD MANAGEMENT AREAS

Data is published in the  
North American Datum 1983  
(NAD83) UTM's, zone 11, meters  
September 15, 2003

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